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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the relationship of values to education and stresses the need to design socially relevant educational systems. Problems which have contributed to the failure of most educational systems to reflect overall cultural values are identified. These include that educators are often oblivious to social needs and are unwilling to suggest innovative approaches within the traditional educational system. Two questions are posed--the first question centering on whether mainstream schools fit general social values and the second focusing on whether it is impossible to use schools as instruments for social reform. The answer to both questions is a qualified 'no'. 'No' to the first question because many school practices and policies reflect the values of special interest groups including educational administrators, politically-motivated school board members, or teachers holding outdated values such as conformity and blind obedience. 'No' to the second question because social reform has historically emanated from education, as in the case of Indians demanding independence from Britain after studying about liberalism and nationalism. A scenario is presented of an ideal social/educational system based on humanism, globalism, resource conservation, a pro-work ethic, stress on citizenship responsibilities, and selective acceptance of innovative technology. The conclusion is that this type of ideal social/educational interaction will be brought about if teachers reevaluate their roles, administrators willingly restructure traditional systems, parents and students redefine their educational needs, and society clarify its values. (DB)

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# Education, Values and the Future

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For my Master's Degree in Education, I had a mandate to design a positive educational scenario for a post-industrial society. (Goldsmith, 1978) It was a rash commitment, for I found myself then faced with the problem of how to create such a design, of having to decide just what would be "ideal" in education and its values.

Beginning with a broad selection of contemporary educational criticism, I then tried systematically to divide it into two piles. Into one pile went all the criticisms of the current educational system, and into the other pile went all the positive suggestions for improvement. Then I set about designing an educational template that would block out and eliminate the negative features, while allowing openings for the development of as many of the positive features as possible, and for the incorporation of some new positive features.

Then I came to a dead halt.

The realisation suddenly dawned that one cannot design an educational system in isolation from the social system of which it is a part. To most of you in this room, that must seem a very obvious statement, and I apologise for the truism. However, the interesting thing to me was that the vast majority--one is tempted to say "all", but the rules of academic discourse demand restraint--the vast majority of the educational texts I had been using as my sources had not made this obvious connection. They were treating the educational system as if it were a thing apart, unanswerable to and unaffected by the overall culture in which it existed.

And the basis of the problem was values.

Values are the purposes and ideals upon which any human system is based. The system may be you, or me, or this Conference, or public education, or the whole of society. Values operate to guide the functioning of the system toward certain purposes. The educational system is a subsystem of the larger system, society. It has been set up by the

larger system to fulfil that society's needs. We educators may like to see ourselves as experts in defining the aims of education, but if those aims do not mesh with the needs of the society outside education, then we have problems. And I would respectfully like to suggest that we have problems right now.

An examination of the recent history of the alternative school movement provides an illustration of the kinds of problems I am suggesting. Neil Postman (1979: 7) refers to the development of the free school movement in the Sixties and Seventies as being like a summer cloudburst--it arrived suddenly, and departed just as suddenly, leaving the system as a whole largely unchanged. The explanation of this lack of impact can, I feel, partly be found in the lack of values-fit between alternative schools and their environment. The values of alternative schooling--freedom, cooperation, the possibility for each student to do what interests him/her rather than follow some irrelevant-seeming set curriculum--these are most laudable, in principle. However, if we concede that there are certain things that the individual needs to learn to get by in our society--such as, for example, reading--then don't we have to make some learnings compulsory, to ensure that they get learned? But what happens to the freedom-to-learn, then? And again, what happens to the individual raised on cooperation in a world that is fiercely competitive? From my experience of children in alternative schools in Australia, these students tend to experience major difficulties when the time comes to leave the safe haven of the alternative school and enter the larger world. What we have in this case is a conflict of values--the school is based on one set of values, and the larger society on another.

This example raises two questions:

1. If some alternative schools do not fit social values and needs, does this mean that mainstream schools do fit these values?
2. If schools need to fit with their social environment, does this mean that it is impossible to use schools as instruments for social reform?

My answer to both these questions would be a qualified "no".

Question 1

Yes, mainstream schools do reflect social values, but, firstly, they may not always be the values that we want reflected. For example, the values that our schools were constructed around may now be outdated, as Alvin Toffler argued in Future Shock (1970). He saw schools as being designed to instil conformity and obedience for a society based on mass-production--a society that needed people to conform and to obey instructions. However, in the rapidly-changing world we have today, being aconformist and a follower can be quite disfunctional. The individual needs self-reliance and the willingness to try new things in an environment of increasing novelty and job-obsolescence. Yet our schools are still based on the values of yesteryear, the model of conformity. In this sense, they are disfunctional, and out of touch with their social environment.

Second, in pluralistic, many-valued societies such as, for example, contemporary Western democracies, there are difficulties in deciding whose values get adopted. As I see it, two power groups tend currently to have predominance in this struggle for value-dominance, at least in the U.S. These are the educational administrators, and those who control the purse-strings. And the mood, financially, is one of retrenchment, in the U.S., where voters have recently rebelled against growing educational budgets. So decisions tend to be based on the values of cost-cutting and administrative convenience, neither of which may be in the interest of improving education, of serving students or society.

Third, in social systems based on "freedom", there can be the notion that any kind of values in education represent propaganda, and that therefore education must be "value free". I would like to contend that this is nonsense, and that "value-free education" is a mythical animal, not capable of realisation under any circumstances.. As Max Lerner

(1976: 13) says, asking whether education should be concerned with values is like asking whether religion should be concerned with godhead. To have a formal education system at all means that we have to choose what is of sufficient value to be worth including in it.

Our only choice is whether we have overt, carefully-constructed values education, or only the covert, unacknowledged values education that we have now, operating through the hidden curriculum and through the value assumptions on which the educational system is based. The operation of these value assumptions has been exposed by writers as diverse as Jules Henry (1963) and Ivan Illich (1971).

Question 2

Some sociologists (e.g., Cosin et al., 1971) would argue that it is impossible to use schools as instruments for social reform, without first reforming the overall social system. Yet history demonstrates otherwise. For example, the Supreme Court, in Brown v. the Board of Education and succeeding decisions, used the American public school system as a major part of the social attack on de jure segregation. However, the more recent attempts to use school busing as a means to end de facto segregation have been markedly less successful to date, and I tend to think that this is so because the schools are not the source of the problem. De jure segregation was a school problem: many schools were deliberately segregated on the basis of color. De facto segregation is a residential and economic problem: blacks tend to be poor, and to live in poor neighbourhoods, where the schools in turn tend to be largely black. With busing to enforce school desegregation, the law is trying to eliminate a symptom rather than treat the cause of the symptom, and the prognosis is not promising. Schools can be used for reform--but only if they are the source of the ailment.

Again, educational systems can have resounding effects on all of society--but these effects may not at all be the results their designers intended. For example, in India in the nineteenth century, after the

British Government took over the country from the East India Company, the British Raj instituted a school system to train Indians to fill the many needed lower- and middle-level positions in the new civil service bureaucracy. Of course, the students were taught English, the language of the rulers, and a very few were even sent on to university in England. There, they were immersed in the rich nineteenth-century literature on liberalism and nationalism, and these books could be taken home and shared with their English-language-educated countrymen. Coincidentally--or perhaps not--there soon developed powerful Indian political organizations demanding self-government and independence, not exactly what the British had had in mind when they set up an educational system to serve (or so they thought) their own values and purposes.

In short, the use of education as a tool for social reform has to be carefully planned, so that it has some chance of success, and so that the end results are not something quite different from the initial intention. We need to take a systemic approach to the design and redesign of our educational systems. We need to explore what they can and cannot achieve, what they do and do not achieve, and what we want them to achieve. By the same token, we must have values education. In a system where values are an unavoidable part of the fabric, we must at least attempt to render them overt, and develop students' sensitivity to and awareness of them. Here, however, I do not wish to minimise the major problems involved in designing a values education that is appropriate and at the same time acceptable to a free society.

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Did I ever work my way through all these values difficulties to design my scenario?--you ask, no doubt with bated breath. My final approach was to construct a social scenario first, and then locate the new "ideal" educational system within that "ideal" social system in a mutually supportive and enhancing relationship. The values on which this utopian society and its educational system were based were

1. those which have come from the humanistic psychology of Maslow and others (personal growth, self-enhancement, and so on),

2. these humanistic values as they are embodied in the educational literature (e.g., Leonard, 1968; Rogers, 1969),
3. those values which will probably be necessary for humankind if we are to survive the crises of the short- and medium-term future--e.g., globalism and resource-conservation (Ecologist, 1972; Reischauer, 1973),
4. the beliefs that work is good, that income is not the only measure of its value, and that it should be both personally and socially fulfilling (Best, 1973),
5. the belief that citizenship carries responsibilities as well as rights (Goldsmith, 1978), and
6. the encouragement, after careful technological assessment, of promising new technologies, such as computers, so that they are applied in socially positive ways.

An important aspect of this social vision was the notion of "selective technology". It seems to me that, within the general heterogeny that is current futurism, two fairly distinct philosophies can be located, among others. One the one hand, there are those who believe that technology can solve all our problems and that everything will be fine if we just leave things to the experts--usually, themselves (Kahn, 1975). On the other hand, there are those who contend that our current problems have been largely caused by technology and experts, and that we need to turn away from these, back toward a simpler, small-is-beautiful, non-growth way of life (Schumacher, 1973). I see both these value-systems as extremist--and extremism is not what is needed. Small isn't always beautiful. Ask the Indian farmer, trying to scratch out a living from one acre of land; or his wife, who has to carry all the household water from the village well. Again, complex electronic technology is meshing the world together, and perhaps McLuhan's vision of a "global village" (1967) may yet come true. However, the technological engine has in the past been allowed to roar along unhampered, with little or no restraint. Its testing laboratory has been society, and its experimental animals unwitting people. As interrelationships and technologies become more complex, the potential

for disaster becomes ever more real. Some form of prior technological assessment has to be introduced for all technologies, not just, for example, drugs, as we have now. Only in this way can unforeseen consequences and too-rapid change be minimised.

A school system based on humanistic values and selective technology would be one where the potential of computers could finally be utilised--but not one where people would be rendered obsolescent. Imagine, teachers, a situation where machines could do all the hack-work and most of the cognitive instruction, and you were freed to be values educators and significant adults engaged in open interpersonal relationships with students--guides, helpers, supporters, and role-models. Imagine a set of compulsory cognitive learnings that were largely taken care of by machines, while you showed students alternatives and possibilities, and helped them with their special interests. In such a situation, we teachers could at last foster independence rather than conformity. We could be helpers, not head-counters, positive assistants rather than negative disciplinarians. In other words, professionals.

And such a situation is possible now. But the changeover to it will require new value-orientations. Teachers must be willing to re-evaluate their roles; administrators must be willing to restructure the system, in spite of their sunk costs in the old way of doing things; parents and students must redefine what they mean by education; most of all, we all need to refine and clarify our values about what education is <u>for</u>, and what we should be getting out of it, at both individual and societal levels. Indeed, we also need to ask what our social system is for, and what we should be getting out of it. If the answers to these questions are unsatisfactory, then the next question is: what are we going to do about it?

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